

APPENDIX G. Wilderness Review

A wilderness review is the process used by the Service to determine whether or not to recommend lands or waters in the National Wildlife Refuge System to Congress for designation as wilderness. The Service is required to conduct a wilderness review for each refuge as part of the CCP process. Land or waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness are identified in a CCP and further evaluated to determine whether they merit recommendation for inclusion in the Wilderness System. The minimum criteria for wilderness is based on the definition of wilderness as defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964:

“A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions, and which:

- (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable;
- (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;
- (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and
- (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

All three of the Gorge Refuges contains substantial evidence of “man’s work” including the Burlington Northern Railroad and Highway 14 running through and/or adjacent to the Refuges. Steigerwald Lake Refuge contains a portion of the Columbia River Dike, a Refuge office converted from a former residence, and the remains of other buildings from prior farmsteads. This 1,049-acre refuge is small for wilderness designation. The Columbia River Dike and adjacent residential and industrial developments also make preservation in an unimpaired condition impractical. Franz Lake Refuge is even smaller at only 552 acres. A two-lane graveled road travels a short distance into the Refuge and there is a mobile home and some outbuildings. Pierce Refuge is the smallest of the three Refuges at only 329 acres. It contains service roads, a mobile home, and a combination single family residence and office. There are also several modern outbuildings and the remains of farmsteads dating back to the 1880s.

None of the Gorge Refuges are recommended for inclusion in the Wilderness System. Their small size, prior and current human uses, and proximity to other human developments do not provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or for primitive and unconfined recreation.